

PLAYING TRICKS

Maria Hupfield

Barry Ace



The American Indian Community House Gallery

March 24 - April 22, 2006

Artist Statement

The seemingly endless narratives of Nanabush reveal his innate ability to transcend both time and space. As well, his super fantastic transformations, quest for self-discovery and inquiries about the world become multi-layered teachings that helps explain the obvious and less obvious. At the crux of Nanabush's legends exists the Aniishnaabek worldview that imparts essential cultural messages, social morals and ethics for future generations. It is from this perspective of the Anishnaabe oral tradition that I approach my work. In applying Nanabush's trickster elements and techniques into visual narratives and mnemonic signifiers, I have morphed myself into my work as the urban storyteller and hipster - trickster ICON Super Phat Nish (*Nish, pronounced Nee-ch, is an endearing cultural slang for Anishnaabe*). As Super Phat Nish, I have created a contemporary space for myself, where I can relevantly engage on contemporary issues of Anishnaabek culture and communities (both urban and rural). Super Phat Nish is the urban hipster who reveals that one can maintain their distinct cultural identity and sensibility in the city. His image, accruements and urban paraphernalia are conscious efforts to confront transition as well as stereotypical representations and portrayals of Indians. Super Phat Nish, like Nanabush the trickster, will play tricks on you in order to get your attention.

Barry Ace, 2006

I am Maria, waabaziikwe, martin clan, Anishnaabe from Wasauksing First Nation, a Mother, Artist, Lover, Crow dressed in Coyote's coat. In context with my work the gallery becomes a space of transformation where the lines and borders that define us, politically, emotionally, historically, spiritually, can be played with and exposed to form new self-defined and active realities. Lines are peeled away, marks made, evidence remains, perspectives are revealed. I view the gallery as a place of possibility. My work is about reclaiming space, moving forward, shifting expectations and making a positive as well as assertive mark in a redrawing of the lines that bind us and the space through which we move.

Maria Hupfield, 2006

Playing Tricks: Maria Hupfield and Barry Ace

In the oral traditions of the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) culture, the presence and lore surrounding Nanabush (or Naanabozho), a transformational and compassionate Woodland trickster, is central to the teachings of life's lessons. Artists Barry Ace and Maria Hupfield learned their lessons well and embrace the dynamic spirit of Nanabush, who dwells deep within their conscious, informing their artwork in a multitude of ways. The gallery is their playground, a metamorphic space for negotiating and mapping out both a distinct and common ground that will ensure the strength of Anishinaabe tradition in the face of transition. Informed by the past and actively engaged in the present, Hupfield and Ace nourish one another's compassion for creativity by affirming a space for their communities to prosper and Nanabush's influence to be felt.

Ace and Hupfield apply a wily sensibility, yet cautious responsibility to their artwork when facing issues and confronting narratives related to history, popular culture, society and politics. By liberating humour, irony and mischief from the confines of oral tradition, the artist invoke a playfulness that reflects and personifies the Indigenous experience in a state of constant adjustment. Through various media and materials, the artists adapt traditional motifs and design, informed by an Anishinaabe aesthetic, to create contemporary works that are innovative and discerning. Such incorporated elements of beauty and adornment emanate a desire, informed by tradition, for a constant cultural continuity to prosper.

Consequently, Ace summons Nanabush's energy into his urban Aboriginal pop icon Super Phat Nish, a character who engages with diverse subcultures in order to bring meaning and understanding to an existing contemporary urban/suburban world of Native America. Hupfield mischievously re-imagines those "defining lines" that bind, by symbolically re-interpreting them through installation and sculpture. Her "redrawn" lines are positioned conceptually as assertive marks to identify, honor and affirm an indigenous presence that is in flux. In doing so, Ace and Hupfield mediate between popular culture and antiquated notions of indigeneity imagined as stagnant and still. Playing Tricks is an evocative strategy for stirring attention to matters of contemporary Anishinaabe life lessons for generations to come.

Nanabush was definitely here.

Ryan Rice
Guest Curator

About the artists and curator

Barry Ace is a member of the M'Chigeeg First Nation, Manitoulin Island, Ontario. He has a Master of Arts degree from Carleton University. As curator and artist, Ace has participated in numerous exhibitions. His solo show *Modern Indians Standing Around the Post* challenged the discourse of "post-colonialism" present within colonial societies. Ace is currently advocating for the newly formed Aboriginal Curatorial Collective. He lives in Ottawa, Ontario.

Maria Hupfield is Martin clan, Anishnaabe from Wasauksing First Nation, Ontario. A recent graduate of the Art and Art History Program at the University of Toronto and Sheridan College, Hupfield received her MFA at York University in Toronto where she lives with her son. Hupfield has exhibited in several shows including *Transitions 2: Contemporary Indian and Inuit Art of Canada*. Hupfield recently performed at the Mountain Standard Time performance art festival in Calgary, Alberta.

Ryan Rice is from Kahnawake, Mohawk Nation in Quebec. He is currently Curator in Residence at the Carleton University Art Gallery in Ottawa, Ontario. He is working on *Requicken: Glenna Matoush* for CUAG, and is coordinating the Nation To Nation project *Atsa':kta: At The Water's Edge*, a site specific installation in Kahnawake.

About the American Indian Community House Gallery

The American Indian Community House Gallery, founded in 1977, is the only non-profit, Native-run Gallery in New York City dedicated exclusively to contemporary Native American art.

For the most up to date information, visit www.aich.org
Gallery Hours: Wednesday-Saturday, 12-6pm; Tuesday by appointment.
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